22: Koenig E-4 (no date) 1938 RD1 Ukraine RD1

SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS AMONG THE GALICIAN UKRAINIANS

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776 THE Ukrainian peasant of south-eastern Poland or Galicia looks upon all the forces of nature as actuated by spirits which must be conceived of as mainly ghost-derived. True nature spirits, whatever importance they may once have had, play to-day only a minor role in the folk beliefs of the Galician Ukrainians.[1] In the spirit environment of the peasant, their place is taken by two classes of beings: the Devil with his cohorts, and the ghosts of the dead.[2] It is to these that the various calamities and afflictions that befall man are attributed, and against them that all possible defensive measures are directed.

The most important spirit, and the most generally feared, is the Devil (*didko*). He causes extremes in natural phenomena with all their disastrous results to man. He brings, not only hail and whirlwinds, but also floods and excessive droughts. Indeed, he or his demons lie behind every mysterious force.[3]

As to the appearance of the Devil, popular beliefs are at varianee. In general, he is thought to assume human shape, but he is black and has horns and a fiery tongue. Although

113 [1] Even Baba Jeudocha, the personification of the snowstorm, and Did (Old Man), the grim winter god who is symbolically burned some days after Christmas, can hardly be looked upon as strict nature spirits; both are said to have been originally human beings who turned into spirits only after their death. (See Kaindl, R. F., "Wetterzauberei bei den Rutenen und Huzulen," *Mittheilungen der k.k. geogr. Gesellschaft*, XXXVII (Wien, 1894), 631, 636.)

[2] Zelenin, D., *Russische (Ostslavische) Volkskunde* (Berlin, 1927), p. 384.

[3] Onyščuk, A., "Materyaly do Huculskoï Demonologii," *Materyaly do Ukrainskoï Etnologii* (Lviw, 1909), XI, 72-3.

776 he may take the form of either sex, the Devil himself is a male.[4] Sometimes he appears as a chimney sweep, when he has wings like a bat, tangled horns like a ram, and a tail.[5] The Devil can change his shape to suit his fancy, and can assume almost any form, e.g., that of a baby, a cow, a pig, an insect, a worm, or a straw.[6] Even when visible in no concrete form, he may nevertheless be present. When one sees a flash of light from afar at dusk, or hears a sudden whisper or rustle, one is certain it is the Devil, whose unseen presence is felt everywhere.[7] The Devil fears nothing save God, the cross, and holy water.[8] Nevertheless, he is mortal, and is particularly vulnerable to lightning. During a thunderstorm he seeks any available cover, but Elijah's arrow discovers him, and destroys him and his shelter.[9] His ordinary abode is hell, whence he ascends at night to pursue his baneful activities on earth.[10]

551 776 The people, as a rule, carefully avoid mentioning the name of the Devil (*didko* or *czort*). To utter it would be blasphemy (*lichoslowyty*), and to blaspheme against the Devil is a serious sin (*hrich welykyj*).[11] The people, therefore, usually resort to a circumlocution and call him *win* (he), *tot szczezby* (that one, may he be lost!), *zlyj duch* (the evil spirit),[12] or *neczystyj* (the unclean one).[13] His name may be mentioned, however, in extreme anger,[14] or he may be called familiarly by a nickname, such as Fedko or Chitko.[15] To some individuals, who have formed a pact with the Devil and have sold him their souls, he is harmless and even exceedingly helpful in attaining power and wealth.

113 [4] Kaindl, R. F., *Die Huzulen* (Wien, 1894), p. 81.
[5] Onyščuk, *op. cit.*, XI, 72.
[6] Kolberg, O., *Przemyskie* (Kraków, 1891), p. 232.
[7] *Idem.*
[8] Kolberg, O., *Pokucie* (Kraków, 4 vols., 1882-9), III, 86n.
[9] Zelenin, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
[10] Kaindl, *op. cit.*, p. 81.
[11] Kolberg, *Pokucie*, III, 81 n.
[12] *Idem.*
[13] Kaindl, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[15] Kolberg, *Przemyskie*, p. 232.

775 The earth, according to peasant belief, literally teems with spirits of all sorts. Aside from Satan and his demons, however, these are mainly the ghosts of unclean persons more or less recently deceased. Some are exceedingly malevolent and harmful; others are less so, but none are beneficial to man.

Among the most dangerous of supernatural beings are the vampires, the ghosts of deceased witches and wizards. Destructive even in life, they have been released by death from all earthly restraints, and their evil nature, now given full freedom, makes them the most feared element in the imaginary environment. Vampires are of both sexes; males are called *opyry* and females *widmy*. Their corpses are revived at night by the action of the moonbeams, for which reason they are most active during the full moon. Leaving their graves, they first turn their steps to their former homes, to visit their families. An *opyr* who is survived by a widow is said to have intercourse with her. He may even beget offspring in this way, but they are born without bones. A *widma*, on the other hand, is innately modest, and is satisfied to turn loving eyes upon her husband or sweetheart. After visiting their homes, the vampires wander about the houses in the vicinity, rattling the doors and windows and even calling the occupants by name. Sometimes they enter a house by crawling under the door. Once inside, they fasten themselves on the chest of a sleeper and suck his warm blood, before hurrying back to their graves. Vampires usually wander for nine consecutive nights. Besides the harm they do to individuals, they send pestilences upon the village and cause excesses in natural phenomena.[16]

Much less harmful, as well as more restricted in their sphere of activities, are the ghosts of ordinary sinners

113 [16] Wagilewicz, J. "O upiorach i wiedźmach", *Časopis českoho museum* (Quoted by O. Kolgerg, *Pokucie*, III, 209, 211).

22: Koenig E-4 (no date) 1938 RD1 Ukraine RD1

775 (*pokutnyky*) and those of persons who have died a violent death. They occupy themselves mainly with praying to God on moonlit nights in front of the church, and with frightening people.[17] Some of them, however, are definitely malignant, especially the ghosts of drowned persons (*topelnyky*). Such ghosts are doomed to roam the earth for seven years. They live in the water, usually near the spot where they met their death, and, like the vampires, are especially active at the full moon.[18] The appearance ascribed to them differs with the locality. Some picture the *topelnyk* as a little man with long hair which reaches to the ground and covers him completely; others describe him as completely covered with fish-like scales.[19] The *topelnyky* are dangerous only to persons on the water, especially to those rowing in a boat. Since their redemption depends upon their success in drowning another person, they are always on the lookout for a victim.[20] In some places no peasant dares to go rowing on a Sunday or holiday, except to attend church or to call a priest or a doctor, under which circumstances the *topelnyky* have no power to harm.[21]

776 The waters also harbour *rusalky*, or nymphs, the ghosts of girls who have died before marriage. Their bodies are half human and half fish-like. They are not, as a rule, harmful, but spend their time singing, praying and telling stories.[22] It is interesting to note that neither the *rusalky* nor the *topelnyky* are really water spirits, i.e. nature spirits, but rather human ghosts who inhabit the waters. This again emphasizes the fact that true nature spirits are almost completely lacking among the Ukrainians. Moreover, the *rusalky* frequently take up their abode in forest glades and

113 [17] Hnatiuk, V., "Znadoby do halicko-ruskoï demonologii," *Etnograficznyj Zbirnik* (Lviw, 1904), XV, 145.

[18] *Ibid*, XV, 154.

[19] Kolberg, *Przemyskie*, p. 233.

[20] Szuchiewicz, W., *Huculszczyzna* (Lwów, 4 vols., 1902-8), IV, 283.

[21] Kolberg, *Przemyskie*, p. 233.

[22] Szuchiewicz, *op. cit.*, IV, 282.

775 springs, and thus also become spirits of the woods and fields.[23]

Closely related to the water nymphs, but more harmful, are the so-called *mavky*, the ghosts of children who died before baptism. They are pictured as girls with tall, graceful figures, round faces and long tresses. They wear garlands of flowers upon their heads and are clothed in very thin, transparent dresses, but their backs entirely lack any covering of flesh, so that their entrails are externally visible.[24] They roam the world begging to be baptized, and are especially active on the Eve of St. John (Kupalo), on which night they entice people and suck their blood. A person misled by them never returns to his people, and after his death his soul is appropriated by the devil.[25]

776 Of a more definitely daimonic and malicious nature than the aforementioned spirits are the *diwe-baby*, *bohinky*, or, as they are usually called among the mountaineers, the *mamuny*. They are superhuman women, malevolent, full of passionate desire to associate with people, but with cold, unfeeling hearts. In appearance they are tall, lean, and pale-faced, and have long disorderly hair and breasts thrown over their shoulders.[26] The *diwe-baby* live in deep unapproachable caves, which they leave at night on mischief bent. Those of them who have children steal into houses where there are unbaptized infants, snatch them away and leave their own "miserable-looking, swollen, cross-eyed bastards" in their stead. Such foundlings cannot be taught to speak or walk; they howl like inhuman fiends, crawl upon their hands and grow very rapidly. In order to get rid of such a child and to get back her own, a mother must take the foundling, put him on the dung-pile, and beat him with a broom or stick until the *baba*, filled with pity for her child, is finally forced to take it back and to return the stolen

[23] Zelenin, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

[24] Kolberg, *Pokucie*, III, 99.

[25] Szuchiewicz, *op. cit.*, IV, 281.

[26] Kolberg, *Pokucie*, III, 100.

22: Koenig E-4 (no date) 1938 RD1 Ukraine RD1

776 infant.[27] The mountaineers, moreover, hold these spirits, some of whom are males, responsible for adultery.[28] The mountaineers likewise believe in a class of supernatural beings, called *czynatary*, who cause quarrels among people. These spirits throw an ant hill full of ants into a burning oven, and just as the ants have no way of escape, so the members of the stricken household cannot help quarreling amongst themselves, and may even go as far as to commit murder.[29]

The so-called *letawica*, or evil spirit of a falling star, is unquestionably the ghost of a wicked being. When it descends to earth it takes on human form of very enticing appearance. It may appear, the people hold, either in male or, less often, in female form, but it is always characterized by youth, beauty, and a slender figure. The *letawica* appears to boys and girls, especially to the latter, in lonely places, when the first promptings of love have been aroused in them. Allured by its display of passion, a girl falls readily into its arms, whereupon it begins sucking the sweetness of youth from her mouth. So passionate is its embrace that the victim gradually loses her freshness, withers, fades and finally dies in its arms.[30]

777 778 According to a widespread popular belief, certain objects or manifestations of nature are fetishes, i.e. they serve as dwellings for evil spirits, and, consequently, must be avoided with great care. One such object is the elder (*byzyna*). One must not dig around it, above all not remove any of its roots, for in them dwells an evil spirit who will cause the hand of any one who disregards the taboo to wither or even bring death to him or to a member of his family.[31] Objects of unusual shape, in particular, are believed to harbour evil

[27] *Ibid.*, III, 100-1.

[28] Szuchiewicz, *op. cit.*, IV, 282. [29] *Ibid.*, IV, 286.

[30] Wagilewicz, *op. cit.* (Quoted by O. Kolberg, *Pokucie*, III, 103.)

[31] Kolberg, *Przemyskie*, p. 235.

775 spirits. A gnarled and crooked tree, for example, should
778 never be felled, lest the anger of its indwelling spirit be aroused. Stones shaped like an egg should not be moved for a similar reason. Crossroads are to be avoided as much as possible, for "the evil spirits, upon being driven out of paradise, have settled there, continuing their malicious activities and causing people all manner of ills".[32] Even natural phenomena may be infested with malevolent spirits. When a whirlwind sucks up a column of dust, the people say that a devil's wedding is taking place. On seeing a twister one must immediately sit down on the ground and recite a formula, especially designed for the occasion; otherwise the whirling dust may get under one's feet and cause them to be crippled.[33]

776 The beings who constitute the spirit environment of the Ukrainian peasant are predominately malevolent. Though a few of them, like the *letawica* and the *topelnyk*, are restricted to a specialized activity, the great majority are capable of causing all kinds of human misery, besides the power they wield over natural forces. They consume the milk from the cows, send sleep upon a man when he is supposed to be keeping watch, uproot trees, roll rocks down from the mountains, send lightning and thunder, cause the death of sheep, and account for the failure of crops. They also cause physical and mental abnormalities, criminal tendencies, and excessive human desires and passions. Deformed children, idiots and imbeciles are the work of vampires and the *diwe-baby*; and murder, quarrels, adultery and sexual irregularities are incited by other malignant ghosts.

[32] Kaindl, *op. cit.*, p. 83. [33] Kolberg, *Pokucie*, III, 91